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## The Soviet Military Advisory and Training Program for the Third World

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### Summary

Since the mid-1970s, the number of Soviet advisers, instructors, and technicians in LDCs and the scope of military training provided in the USSR has expanded significantly. In 1983 some 17,500 Soviet military personnel (excluding troops) were stationed in LDCs as diverse as Peru, Tanzania, and Syria. In addition, an estimated 4,200 trainees from the Third World—most of them from the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia—went to the USSR for military training. Both are record numbers. Moscow's willingness to provide this assistance reflects its view of the opportunities to increase its presence, and hopefully influence, in LDCs. During the past decade, the program also has earned substantial hard currency for Moscow, although such considerations apparently remain secondary to the Soviets.

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### Experts in LDCs: Expanded Presence and Functions

Between 1978 and 1983 the estimated presence of Soviet military advisers, technicians, and instructors in LDCs grew by more than 60 percent, largely as a result of higher volumes of arms deliveries, which included increasingly sophisticated weapons (figures 1 and 2). Security/intelligence assistance gave further impetus to the growth, as did Moscow's continued willingness to provide services under more generous financial terms than the West. In 1983 the Soviet contingent was by far the largest in Syria, which accounted for about 30 percent of the total Third World presence. Large groups also were in Libya, Ethiopia, Angola, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Yemens, while smaller numbers were posted to countries like Mozambique, Algeria, India, Peru, and Nicaragua.

About three-fourths of Soviet military and paramilitary personnel in LDCs probably are assigned to LDC armed forces. Armies, almost always the largest

service that absorb the greatest volume of weapons imports, account for an estimated 30 percent of these personnel. Air forces and air defense units, although much smaller, together probably comprise a similar share because of the inability of most clients to operate and maintain even moderately sophisticated weapons. Few Soviets, by contrast, are assigned to LDC navies—almost always the smallest service.

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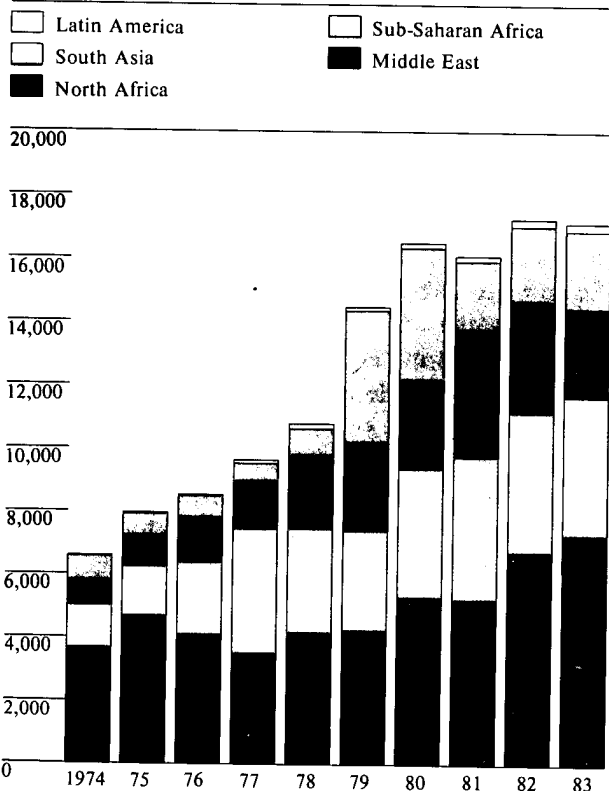
Soviet officers sent to LDCs typically function as advisers to the various services and—to a lesser extent—as academic instructors. In recent years these officers have:

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**Figure 1**  
**USSR: Military and Security/Intelligence**  
**Personnel in LDCs, 1974-83**

Number of persons<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Estimated number of persons present for one month or more. Excludes troops.

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- Occasionally, provided operational support in a combat situation (Soviets now man SA-5 surface-to-air missiles in Syria, according to US attache reporting).

Despite the preponderance of Soviets in LDC armed services, the number of security/intelligence personnel reportedly has grown most rapidly. By 1983 an estimated 10 percent of Soviet military personnel in LDCs were security/intelligence operatives. This growth reflects the efforts of most radical regimes to consolidate revolutionary gains and—at least as important—capitalization by the Soviets on an excellent

means of penetrating LDCs.

Embassy reporting indicate that KGB and GRU (military intelligence) operatives have been sent to LDCs as politically diverse as Zambia, Syria, and Nicaragua to:

- Establish or reorganize security/intelligence units.
- Provide instruction in country and oversee intelligence collection against a recipient's adversaries.
- Conduct surveillance of foreigners.
- Monitor the activities of other Soviets.

The presence of Soviet security and intelligence experts in LDCs also provides Moscow the opportunity to gather intelligence on the host country.

#### Military Training in the USSR:

##### Diverse Courses and Clients

Since the late 1970s, Moscow has provided an expanded variety of military and related instruction in the USSR to foreign students from a growing number of LDCs. Training is focused on the operation, maintenance, and repair of weapon systems and tactical military planning, largely because of continuing high levels of arms deliveries to LDCs. Anticipated deliveries of new types of weapons—to either established or new clients—often will lead to the dispatch of trainees at least several months before the equipment is received. Officers from Grenada, for example—including the Army Chief of Staff and Deputy Ministers of Defense—were provided specialist training in the USSR before armored vehicles arrived in 1982, according to captured documents.

An estimated two-thirds of all LDC military and paramilitary trainees sent to the USSR in 1979-83 (figure 3) received instruction on ground weapons, fighter aircraft, and air defense hardware—the most important military items supplied by Moscow.

Specialized training is concentrated in the USSR because of the lack of facilities and other support in LDCs to accommodate training on advanced weapons, in security/intelligence, and for staff officers.

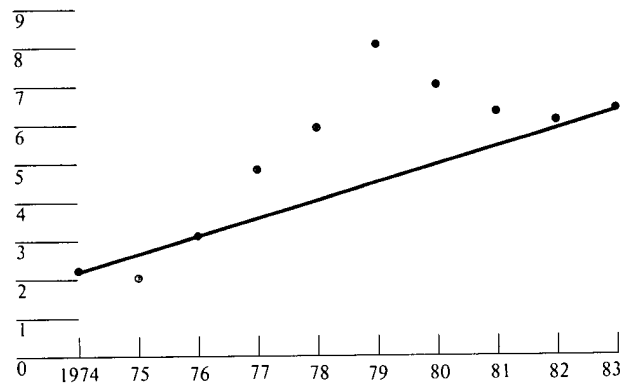
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**Figure 2**  
**USSR: Comparison of Military Deliveries and**  
**Military Presence in LDCs, 1974-83**

Note change in scales

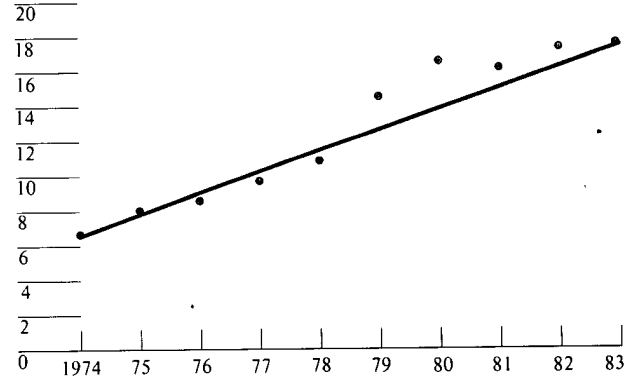
USSR: Military Deliveries to LDCs

Billion US \$



USSR: Military Advisory Personnel  
 Present in LDCs<sup>a</sup>

Thousand persons



<sup>a</sup> Minimum number present for one month or more. Excludes troops.

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Moscow also encourages training in the USSR because of the favorable environment there for propagandizing frequently impressionable LDC personnel. Regardless of the military rank of the trainee, his country of origin, or the substantive content of specific courses, heavy doses of political and ideological indoctrination almost always are integral parts of Soviet instruction.

The bulk of Third World trainees in the USSR are government sponsored, but a number of insurgent and irredentist groups also receive training there.

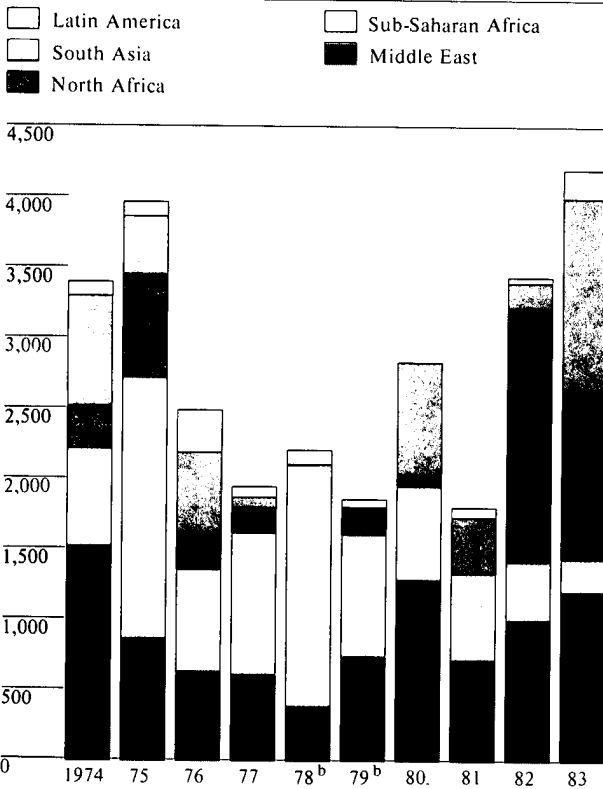
several hundred of the Third World trainees departing for the USSR in recent years were Palestinians and Zimbabwe insurgents:

Attache reporting and open sources indicate that Moscow provides training at:

- *Military and higher military schools*, which offer theoretical and practical instruction, mainly for officers.
- *Academies*, which typically give advanced training.
- *Special institutes*, which ordinarily provide brief courses on specific subjects, such as weapons firing.
- *Autonomous facilities*, where LDC enlisted men are taught operational and technical subjects.
- *State manufacturing facilities*, such as tank plants.

**Figure 3**  
**USSR: Military and Related Trainees**  
**From LDCs, 1974-83**

Number of persons<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Estimated number of departures. Actual departures to the USSR probably are significantly higher and more evenly distributed than depicted above; a poor data base, however, prevents better quantification.

<sup>b</sup> Data not available for South Asia.

Soviet policy stipulates that training be geared to the "cultural level" of students, according to US attache reporting. Trainees from more advanced LDCs, such as Syria, ostensibly receive instruction similar to that provided Soviets, while Angolans, North Yemenis, and others are taught at a more basic level. All trainees take a number of "core" courses, including language training for curriculums longer than a year,

Many weapons technicians and operators and pilots without prior experience take the same basic mathematics and physics courses

#### Surging Hard Currency Receipts

One of Moscow's motivations for providing advisory and training assistance to LDCs is financial. Although Soviet terms remain concessional compared with those of Western suppliers, Moscow increasingly has attempted to generate hard currency earnings from the program. This policy was adopted after the 1973 Middle East war, when key Soviet clients in the Middle East and North Africa realized large increases in oil revenues. Most of the LDCs now obligated to pay for Soviet assistance are major oil producers,

We estimate,

that hard currency obligations of LDCs for technical services totaled over \$600 million in 1979-83—more than twice the amount during the previous five years. Some three-fourths of the 1979-83 total probably came from payments for Soviets posted to LDCs, since Moscow absorbs most of the costs of training in the USSR,

payments by Libya constituted roughly one-third of receipts, while Algeria, Angola, Iraq, and Syria made up most of the remainder.

#### An Assessment: Gains Outweigh Costs

The large-scale expansion of the Soviet advisory and training program since the mid-1970s reflects mutual, practical benefits to Moscow and its clients, although both sides have not fully realized their aims. To the extent that the expanded Soviet presence abroad and

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stepped-up training in the USSR have been at Western expense, Moscow has realized its goal of denying or reducing non-Communist initiatives. In some cases—mainly among ideologically compatible, heavily dependent clients—Moscow has been able to translate an active program into true gains in influence. Improvements in Moscow's position attributable to the training program often are manifested when pro-Soviet alumni assume positions of key responsibility in their government. Most serve in radical regimes, such as Angola, Syria, and Ethiopia. Similarly, high-ranking Soviet military advisers often are at or near the power center because the military is the leading political force of many Third World nations. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Finally, a deterioration in Soviet relations with specific clients and the financial burden of providing support to some nonpaying LDCs could lead to selectively reduced assistance.

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Although most recipients view Soviet advisory services and training as essential elements of military assistance and some have complimented Soviet efforts, Moscow has failed to realize gains in influence proportionate to growth in the Soviet program. Soviet clients, regardless of their political orientation, distrust Moscow to varying degrees, questioning its true motivations for providing assistance. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] On a working level, substantive deficiencies and Soviet heavyhandedness are frequent complaints. [REDACTED]

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Soviet *Weltanschauung* historically has emphasized the long term, viewing setbacks largely as events posing future opportunities. Moscow's commitments to this perspective—manifested also in arms transfers, the main tangible determinant of the scope of the advisory and training program—presages continued growth in the program. Nevertheless, political and other constraints could slow the rate of expansion.

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